



December 29, 2017

Attn: Forest Plan Revision
Dan Dallas, Supervisor
Rio Grande National Forest
[1803 W. Highway 160](#)
[Monte Vista, CO 81144](#)
E-mail to: rgnf_forest_plan@fs.fed.us

Dear Supervisor Dallas:

Other than the substantive comments we have already submitted, I am writing to express a personal comment about the importance of reviewing the conservation designations that were proposed in Alternative D. This includes the 285,000 acres recommended for Wilderness, Carnero and Jim Creek Native Fish Areas, Chama Basin Watershed Protection Area, the Spruce-Osier connectivity area and the expanded La Ventana Special Interest Area (SIA).

The research and best available science that was applied to our original recommendations submitted last October 2016, was significant. I believe those recommendations totaled in the neighborhood of about 500,000 acres. These areas are the current unprotected gems of the Rio Grande Forest that provide so much value, in the form of Ecosystem Services, to our forest. Carbon sequestering, watershed quantity and quality, wildlife connectivity, plant and wildlife movement for adaptiveness; these are the values that will determine how the region will be able to mitigate the real human pressures that will be placed upon it over the next 20 years.

There is a tremendous opportunity here, despite the political climate, to maintain the pristine, solitude nature of the Rio Grande Forest, especially on the San Juan mountain side, which is far more accessible to human fossil fuel recreation and will become more of a target over the next twenty years, as other adjoining Forests become more crowded. Couple that with the roads that will be going in to accommodate the timber industry, and we will have a very different looking forest in 20 years.

Yes, the forest has changed in the last twenty years, especially with beetle kill, but that is a natural occurrence, in response to climate change, that will rejuvenate itself. Bringing more

recreation and humans onto the landscape will impede that ecological process, make no mistake.

At the very least, please consider establishing native fish protection areas with strong management requirements that will help sustain and restore the native trout populations, which will be very important as fish are increasingly stressed by climate change and human activities. Designating the Chama Basin Watershed Protection Area will protect this remarkably scenic and unusual basin and the water it provides to New Mexico. Designating the Spruce-Osier wildlife corridor connecting the Carson and Rio Grande National Forests will ensure management focused on protecting wildlife movement and habitat connectivity.

Lastly, please consider designating the expanded La Ventana SIA will protect the larger footprint of a significant geologic landmark that also overlaps with areas identified by Colorado Natural Heritage Program for unique and rare botanical values.

While I support the array of recommended designations in Alternative D, please at a minimum recommend the following places for wilderness:

Sangre de Cristo Recommended Wilderness Additions (Butterfly Creek-Miller Creek, Cotton Creek, Kit Carson Peak and Blanca Peak additions). *Thank you for including these areas in Alternatives B and D.* These additions will effectively extend the wilderness to logical landscape boundaries to protect the scenic integrity and biodiversity of the stunning mountain backdrop and strengthen protection for iconic and popular peaks in the Sangres.

Wannamaker Creek-Deep Creek addition to the La Garita Wilderness (Saguache Ranger District). This addition includes five miles of the South Fork of Saguache Creek. The area is naturally appearing, and supports a broad diversity of aquatic and terrestrial habitats and contains a largely undisturbed hydrological regime. There are no vehicle routes or past management activities within the proposed wilderness addition.

Adams Fork Addition, Three Forks addition to South San Juan Wilderness (Conejos Peak Ranger District). The Adams Fork trail provides outstanding hiking, backpacking, horsepacking, angling, and backcountry hunting. The Adams Fork addition is a documented high use area for lynx and was part of one of the initial core areas lynx established after reintroduction. It also supports a recreation population of Rio Grande cutthroat trout.

Antora Meadows Recommended Wilderness is a critical area for regional wildlife connectivity and conservation that will help fill the largest gap in protected areas in the Southern Rockies between La Garita Wilderness on the south and Collegiate Peaks and Sangre de Cristo Wilderness areas to the north. Protecting it will increase ecosystem

functions currently under-represented in the wilderness system, as well as conservation of imperiled or at-risk species: Rio Grande cutthroat trout; and habitat for lynx, wolverine, and Mexican spotted owl. In addition, it's got lots of trails and is great for recreation.

Saguache Creek Recommended Wilderness is mainly grasslands and ponderosa pine, low-elevation ecosystems that desperately need more representation in the wilderness system. Like Antora Meadows, it also helps fill in major gaps in regional protected area networks and offers outstanding recreation. The recommended area includes seven miles of an eligible wild river.

Designating recommended Wilderness areas, wildlife habitat connectivity areas, native fish areas, and other SIAs will mean that these areas would not see industrial activities for the duration of the land management plan. It is especially important to me that oil and gas surface development is not allowed in these places to protect their special values.

It is also important to me that the plan have enforceable provisions to protect water, wildlife, and other resources. In the face of ever-increasing threats of resource extraction and over-development, I urge you to safeguard these high value conservation lands now to protect our local economy, natural heritage, opportunities for outdoor recreation, and livelihood for future generations.

One last comment, I just want to say that it irks me when people refer to environmental organizations as an "interest group". We are representing everyone, whether they care for our representation or not. It's unfortunate that we live in such an uneducated culture, in terms of natural resource impacts and the cause and effect of human activities.

It's not about what we say, it's about what science is telling us. Please be courageous with this plan, and consider long term impacts and creating the opportunity for the Forests ability to adapt, that's real adaptive management.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Christine Canaly".

Christine Canaly
Director, San Luis Valley Ecosystem Council
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